

REMARKS

The above-referenced application was filed on September 20, 2006, including claims 1-29. In a first office action, certain informal claim objections were raised, and each of claims 1-29 was rejected as either anticipated or rendered obvious by the prior art. By way of this amendment, claims 1, 10, 18 and 19 are amended. Applicants ask that each of the claims be reconsidered in light of the foregoing amendments and the following remarks.

First, with respect to the claim informalities, Applicants have amended such claims in exact accordance with the suggestions of the Examiner. It is submitted that these objections should therefore be withdrawn.

Turning to the prior art rejections, claims 1-9, 13-25 and 29 have been rejected as anticipated by Li, US Patent No. 6,325,909; while claims 10-12 and 26-28 have been rejected as obvious over Li in further view of Leiber, US Patent Publication No. 2002/0130311. However, independent claims 1 and 19 (and thus all dependent claims) have been amended to additionally specify that the support material has first and second surfaces, the first anodizing operation is carried out along a first direction on the first surface, and that a second anodizing operation is carried out along a second direction on the second surface, so as to form pores which extend in different directions. As the cited art fails to disclose or suggest such elements, the anticipation and obviousness rejections must be withdrawn as well.

As far as support for such claim amendments is concerned, the original specification clearly shows a first embodiment in Figure 1.2, wherein the support material 1 is anodized in order to form a first network of pores extending essentially radially over the thickness of a surface layer (see also page 8, lines 34-37 of the application as filed). Please also refer to the expression "radial anodizing step" on the last line of page 8. As shown on Fig. 1.7, a second network 17 of pores is formed on a second surface of the support material 1, namely the tip of the support material. Please refer also to page 10, lines 5-20, in particular to lines 18-20, which state "the pores of the second network 17 are oriented essentially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the support material 1." The same applies to the second embodiment (Figures 3.3 and 3-8) and the third embodiment of Figure 4 (pores 3 and 17).

Li fails to disclose such elements. As acknowledged by the Examiner, Li teaches a process in which a first anodizing operation is carried out on the support material in order to form at least one first pore that extends, in this support material, along a first direction. Then, Li reduces the voltage to reduce the pore cell diameter (column 5, lines 49-52). Hence, this second step is the same anodizing operation, only different by the level of applied anodizing voltage.

Li therefore does not describe a second anodizing operation carried out along a second direction in order to form on the second surface at least one second pore that extends in the support material along said second direction, different from the first direction, as claimed. Li carries out a second anodizing operation along the same first direction, on the same first surface, in order to form on that surface a pore of reduced diameter, but extending in the support material, along the same first direction. Although Li mentions a Y-shaped pore shown schematically on Figs. 4a and 4b, it must be recognized that due to Li's process, the branches of the Y will extend parallel to the stem of the Y along a given direction. This is more clearly seen on Fig. 1a of Li.

In light of the foregoing, the claims are novel over Li.

As for obviousness, since Li intends to perform Y shaped pores, it is particularly important for the process described in Li that the two anodizing steps be performed along the same direction, and furthermore with a very specific voltage ratio. Hence, there is no motivation to modify Li to obtain the object of claim 1 and 19. Claims 1 and 19 is therefore not obvious in view of Li.

The same is true with respect to claims dependent from claims 1 and 19. For this the Examiner additionally cites Leiber. However, turning to claim 8 for example, there is no mention in the references that the support material constitutes a self supporting structure for a component, and a self supporting structure for electrical contact means. The passages cited by the Examiner, column 5, lines 12-16 and lines 34-37, do not at all mention the support to be a self-supporting structure for electrical contact means. Regarding claim 10, there is no motivation to replace the support material of Li by a portion of wire, since in Li, a planar surface is essential to allow for the proper formation of the Y-shaped pores.

In light of the foregoing, the claims are non-obvious over Li and Leiber.

Based on all of the above, each of the pending claims is in condition for allowance and applicants respectfully request same. Should the Examiner have any questions, he is invited to telephone the undersigned.

Dated: July 17, 2009

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